

NWA WorldTraveler

Word count—600

Headline: Gov. Haley Barbour

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By Lynne Jeter

Bolstered by his strong leadership in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour handily won a second term. *NWA WorldTraveler's* upfront Q&A with the governor includes serious questions about the state and its future and light-hearted queries about his favorite attractions and restaurants. We also asked Barbour about the Mississippi culture—the strong bond and familiarity that connects people around the state.

Rebekah, FYI note from the assignment editor: *NWA WorldTraveler* aims to provide the same kind of high-quality travel information as *Travel+Leisure* and *New York Times* travel section, and appeals to the sophisticated business and leisure traveler. Answers probably need to be limited to 100 words each.

1. What are the most pressing issues facing Mississippi? (Could include legislative priority items.)

GHB: The most pressing issues are how best to continue the surge in job creation; continuing to recover from Hurricane Katrina, the worst natural disaster in American history; making further improvements in our education system; improving health care; and managing the budget in a time of flat revenue. Over a longer term, we're taking a closer look at the basic fairness of the state tax system with an eye toward making sure the system works to enhance creation of new jobs and economic growth. We're doing all this without shortchanging our top priorities, such as education, law enforcement, and health care for truly needy Mississippians, and those kinds of efforts will certainly continue.

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2. Assess the rebuilding needs of the Mississippi Gulf Coast, and what needs to happen in the next four years to accomplish the goal of making it better than before Katrina hit?

GHB: From the earliest days after the hurricane, which struck on August 29, 2005, my focus has been on helping our citizens recover and rebuild. It's not just along the Coast; hurricane-force winds caused damages nearly 250 miles inland, too. Through various programs, more than \$1 billion has been awarded to assist nearly 18,000 families restore or rebuild their homes and the final touches are under way on ways to finance construction of 16,000 units of affordable rental housing, especially in the workforce income and small rental areas. To maintain a stable statewide insurance market, I've supported development of a federal program on all-perils insurance coverage and a federal catastrophic disaster reinsurance program. Through grants and other financial assistance, we've helped local communities foster community revitalization projects and

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rebuild downtown areas for increased economic development and job creation. In terms of rebuilding, we've got a mighty tall mountain ahead of us, but I'm confident that working together, we'll prevail in our goal of a Gulf Coast that's bigger and better than ever.

3. In the past eight years, Mississippi has landed Nissan and Toyota automotive manufacturing plants. What other paths of economic development do you see in the state's future?

GHB: We've worked aggressively on carving out a major role for Mississippi in the automotive manufacturing sector, including actively recruiting automotive suppliers for the big Toyota and Nissan plants. And, workforce development programs have been completely revamped and upgraded so employers can find the workers they need in steel, aerospace, shipbuilding and other important industries. Also, Mississippi will be on the leading edge in the production and distribution of energy resources, as projects valued at \$26.3 billion have been either announced or are under consideration. From transmission and storage, to biofuels, liquefied natural gas, clean coal and coal to liquid, and nuclear power, Mississippi's abundant resources and developing alternative, affordable, and sustainable sources of energy mean we'll play a huge role in America's energy future. Along with manufacturing and energy, the services sector is growing in Mississippi, too, with advanced solutions centers already announced by Comcast and Automatic Data Processing. With a top tier workforce and high quality of life, Mississippi truly is poised for tremendous success.

4. What makes Mississippi's culture (and heritage) so unique?
Note from the assignment editor: one thing to touch on is how the diverse and far-flung people of Mississippi have a remarkable shared culture and practice unparalleled cooperation in business, education and recreation.

GHB: Around here, there's an old saying that Mississippi isn't a state; it's a community. and I think that really captures the strong sense of kinship and tradition Mississippians share -- respect for the land, for each other, and a real desire for moving forward together. Mississippi is known as the "Hospitality State," which I think was most reflected after Katrina when the world saw our resilient, self-reliant people hitch up their britches and get right to work, helping their neighbors before helping themselves. Our pace, and perhaps speech, may be a little slower, but our food is a little sweeter and our hearts a little warmer. Whether you're listening to the Delta blues or simply enjoying a glass of tea with a neighbor, Mississippi is the place that captures the Southern spirit of hospitality and heritage.

5. Tell us a few of your favorite local hotspots (restaurants, attractions, etc.) and places to visit around Mississippi.

GHB: With a long, rich heritage, Mississippi is overflowing with unique attractions. Regarded as the "birthplace of America's music," Mississippi is home

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to the largest collection of blues music at the University of Mississippi in Oxford. My hometown of Yazoo City is the gateway to the Delta, where the soulful blues got its start. In fact, we've launched the Mississippi Blues Trail, which pays tribute to some of our greatest musicians, including Elvis Presley, through historical markers and interpretative sites (www.msbluestrail.org). History buffs will enjoy visiting significant Civil War sites and antebellum homes in towns like Columbus, Corinth, Raymond, Vicksburg and Natchez, and arts enthusiasts can visit Eudora Welty's home in Jackson, William Faulkner's home in Oxford, the Mississippi Museum of Art in Jackson, featuring the colorful work of Walter Anderson, among others, or the Ohr-O'Keefe Museum in Biloxi. There's a gorgeous sand beach on the Coast, not to mention great fresh seafood. Just let me say in Mississippi, there's something for everyone to enjoy!

SOURCE: Rebekah Staples, (601) 576-2037

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- Deleted: 6. There's been talk for some time of you being tapped for national office, most recently as a vice presidential candidate. What does that potential mean for both Mississippi and your career? ¶
¶ GHB: Thank you for the thought but, as I've said before, I'm still on hurricane duty here in Mississippi.